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INFO RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 003174

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/10/2031
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: MILITARY CLASHES WITH FISHERMEN, LEAVES NINE
WOUNDED

REF: CARACAS 2990

Classified By: Robert Downes, Political Counselor,
for Reason 1.4(b).

¶1. (U) SUMMARY Violent clashes in the port of Guiria in Sucre state left nine fishermen injured on October 19. Fishermen took control of the port in early October, protesting the awarding of a contract to a new port administrator. Police and military forces, accompanied by state governor Ramon Martinez, stormed the port October 19 to remove forcefully the fishermen, opening fire and apparently wounding nine. This incident is the latest in a spate of shootings where BRV military forces have engaged in excessive force resulting in dead or injured civilians. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) Fishermen took control of the port of Guiria in Sucre state approximately two weeks ago, demanding the state rescind a contract with a new port administrator. The aggrieved fishermen took over the port in hopes of pressuring the state government to renew its contract with the current administrator, so that they could maintain their jobs. The fishermen were also protesting the closure of an ice plant at the port, without which they could not preserve their catches.

¶3. (U) In the early morning of October 19, police and military forces, accompanied by Sucre Governor Ramon Martinez, stormed the Pesquero International Port in Guiria to remove forcefully protesting fishermen. The soldiers, ordered to disperse the protesters, opened fire, resulting in nine wounded fishermen. Sympathizers of the fishermen also descended on Guiria city hall, leaving municipal buildings in flames.

¶4. (U) Governor Martinez on October 19 said that there were sinister forces behind the clash with the fishermen at work to destabilize the country. He said that certain generals in the National Guard are linked to these forces. He also accused a member of opposition party Primero Justicia of lending a boat to protesting fishermen to sail the three hours to Trinidad and attempt to besiege the Venezuelan embassy in that country (military forces reportedly intercepted the alleged plotters at sea). The president of the Port, Humberto Mata, told press that the taking of the port is actually part of a greater, but still localized, political movement against Martinez.

¶5. (U) The National Assembly on October 19 named a commission to investigate the violence in Guiria. The commission has eight days to present its report, proposing

solutions acceptable to the state and municipal governments, as well as the federal Ministry of Agriculture and Lands and the fishermen.

COMMENT

16. (C) Lurid reports of use of excessive military force against civilians have been in the news in recent weeks. We now add nine wounded fishermen to the dozens of miners killed in Bolivar state (reftel) and the Guyanese miner killed near the Venezuelan-Guyana border.

BROWNFIELD